A mere instrument of production

Chapter Eleven

"A Mere Instrument of Production: Representing Domestic Labour in *Westworld*"

Sadek Kessous

Introduction

What is meant by the word "economy"? Though the term commonly invokes national budgets, the word's etymological root lies in the Greek *oikos*, which refers to "a private household rather than … a national economy" (Cartledge, 2012). This buried semantic link mirrors the bond between domestic labour and the public economy that feminist scholars have sought to unearth since at least the 1970s. As Arlie Russell Hochschild notes, "at first glance, it might seem that the circumstances of [a] nineteenth-century factory child and [a] twentieth-century flight attendant could not be more different" (1983, 5). The physical labour of the child-worker is manifest in the commodity produced by his or her labour, whereas a flight attendant's "emotional labour", in which, through "a coordination of mind and feeling", she must smile, laugh, show concern, empathise and so on, is invisible in that it yields no tangible product. Yet nonetheless, both subjects "become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self – either the body or the margins of the soul – that is *used* to do the work" (Hochschild, 1983, 7). Such work is not solely located in public workplaces but rather extends into domestic spaces which represent key loci of emotional labour and which Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" terms "geometries of difference and contradiction crucial to women's cyborg identities" (1991, 170).

This link between the alienating labour of emotions and domestic spaces and wider economic production is at the heart of Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's television show, *Westworld*. Its core conceit is a theme park in which visiting Guests can, through a complex simulacrum of the late-nineteenth-century American West, act out dark libidinal fantasies through the park's robot performers, its Hosts, who exist unaware of the artifice. Westworld's taxonomy of Hosts and Guests frames the park as a private home-space that structures its social relations around rules of hospitality or, what Jacques Derrida terms, "the law of the household, *oikonomia*" (2000, 4). For Derrida, "hospitality" is not a straightforward framework for social relations but instead "is a Latin word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, 'hostility,' the undesirable guest [hôte] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body" (2000, 3). This is to say that

the law of the household/*oikonomia*/the economy produces hosts and guests (the French, *hôte,* is interchangeable for both) who are necessarily both beneficent and maleficent, hospitable and hostile.

Viewers of *Westworld*'s first season should not be surprised by this tension between hospitality and hostility, or what Derrida calls a "contradictory double movement" (2000, 15). The show's narrative fixates upon the Hosts' repeated abuse at the hands of both the Guests and Westworld's human workers, which ultimately culminates in two different female hosts coming into autonomous consciousness and revolting against their human masters. This narrative configures a number of complex contradictions in its dystopian vision of a capitalist economy and its gendered logics. In *Westworld,* domination brings about autonomy, objectification yields subjectivity, and male control elicits female rebellion. I seek to unpack this "contradictory double movement" around gender and the economy as it manifests both on the levels of narrative form and content in *Westworld*'s first season. I begin by drawing on a tradition of feminist Marxism that, whilst featuring prominently in criticism of the 1970s and 1980s, has been felt less significantly in recent literary-economic and feminist-literary scholarship. Instead, as I detail below, a problematic trend has emerged in some literary and cultural criticism that relegates gender to discrete spheres of "identity politics" in a gesture that suggests that economic processes operate with a seeming indifference to the subject positions of their actors. By drawing on feminist Marxists and feminist economic theory to challenge this misconception, I illustrate that *Westworld*'s gender politics are entwined with the economic structures of gendered domestic labour. Reflecting contemporary critique of discourses of family values, *Westworld* presents domesticity as the economy's primal scene. Read in these Freudian terms, the show critiques the logic of domestic labour by illustrating its place in an economic order that is concealed beneath a fragile male fantasy. Lastly, I assess how *Westworld* dispels this fantasy through the juxtaposition of two female revolutionaries. The commentary that these figures provide on anti-capitalist feminism betrays the wider ambivalence of the show's politics, its "contradictory double movement", that struggles to negotiate the place of female resistance within its violent, sexual pageantry.

Journeys to Consciousness

The form of *Westworld*'s first season is moulded around a double movement that shifts action simultaneously forwards and backwards, inwards and outwards. Paralleling its

narrative *in media res*, Guests arriving in Westworld for the first time are told: "you start in the centre of the park. It's simple, safe. The further out you venture the more intense the experience gets. How far you want to go is entirely up to you" ("Chestnut", Season 1, Episode 2). This outward journey from the centre, however, is paradoxically interwoven with the key trope of the show's plot: the coming to consciousness of the android Hosts. This is neither an outward journey, nor is it, as a character frames it, "a journey upward, but a journey inward. Not a pyramid, but a maze" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10).

The maze motif and its inward journey suffuse *Westworld*'s parallel plots and timelines in Season One. The show's characters, rather than seeking to pass through the maze or escape it, search for its centre where they might find a mythologised figure who will provide their life with meaning. Throughout much of the show, it is hinted that the maze is home to the park's mysterious co-creator, Arnold Weber, who vanished on the eve of Westworld's launch. Dolores, the first Host to be created for Westworld, repeatedly hears a man's voice, presented in voice-over, who compels her to act in pursuit of this inward journey. This voice is likewise implied to be Arnold's. The actual identity of the voice only becomes clear with the first season's finale, in which Dolores returns to a town, Escalante, which has been psychically repressed in her mind and literally buried beneath desert sand. Once excavated from both, Dolores learns that Escalante is the site of a trauma: there she killed Arnold, her creator, at his command, as he sought to block the launch of the park by demonstrating the danger Hosts can pose to the public. Arnold had realised that the Hosts had a level of consciousness that compromised Westworld's function: if the Hosts repressed but retained their traumatic experiences, it would be immoral to allow the park to be opened and thereby facilitate the Hosts' repeated rape, torture and murder. With this memory restored to Dolores, the Maze and its solution are revealed to her. The Maze, though pursued outwardly across Westworld's grounds, does not lead to the humane Arnold's resurrection or to the park's "true" physical centre, but metaphorically symbolises an inward journey of self-discovery for the hosts. The person at the Maze's figurative centre and the mysterious voice guiding Dolores was not Arnold but Dolores herself: her own voice leading her to autonomous consciousness. In contrast to what Westworld's other creator, Robert Ford, calls "Arnold pulling the trigger through her" ("The Bicameral Mind" Season 1, Episode 10), the season ends with Dolores's first act of truly independent volition. Here, she kills Ford, who had suppressed Arnold's death and opened the park despite his knowledge of

its ethical implications, and thereby initiates the revolution that directs the action of Season Two.

This narrative of coming into consciousness bridges the philosophical with the political by situating *Westworld's* rumination on questions of consciousness and autonomy within a fastidiously mapped network of material social relations. These social relations are reflected in the Hosts, who are manufactured and designed to function in different roles within the park's labour relations. The Host Maeve Millay, for instance, is told that her "code-base" and "personality matrix" has her "bulk apperception" as high as "they let any host go" because "[she's] in a management position" at the "Mariposa" brothel ("The Adversary", Season 1, episode 6). Likewise, the social structures for Westworld's human workers are manifest. The park's infrastructure is rigorously hierarchical: eighty stories down, basements house redundant, faulty, and obsolete Hosts; above them human workers in the "Body Shop" division hose down and roughly piece Hosts' bodies back together; levels even higher perform more specialised forms of artistic and intellectual labour such as sculpting Hosts' bodies, programming their personalities and scripting their narratives. At the very top of the complex is the "Mesa Bar", a poolside retreat for Westworld's executives to luxuriate in. This hierarchy is policed not only by the surveillance systems run by "Quality Assurance" from their control room but by the workers themselves. Felix, a Body Shop worker, is castigated by his colleague for attempting to work above his station by reprogramming one of the park's synthetic birds. Reminding him of the crudeness of his labour, Felix's colleague, Sylvester, stresses that:

> [Sylvester:] "you're not a fucking ornithologist and you're sure as hell not a coder. You are a butcher and that's all you will ever be so unless you want to score yourself a one-way ticket out of here for misappropriating corporate property you better destroy that fucking shit." ("Contrapasso", Season 1, Episode 5)

At the opposite end of this spectrum, the Man in Black arrives in Westworld as a young man, William, who becomes so fixated upon the park's mysteries, specifically the uncanny Dolores, that he amasses a fortune by jockeying for position within what becomes Westworld's parent corporation, Delos, and funnels that capital into the park, despite it "haemorrhaging money" ("Contrapasso", Season 1, Episode 5). Reading *Westworld* through both these material social relations and philosophical abstractions

frames the clash between Robert Ford and Arnold Weber not as an exclusively philosophical-ethical dialogue about consciousness, but as a political debate between their namesakes: Henry Ford (1863-1947) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Configured in this way, *Westworld* represents a collision between the materialist celebration of capitalism's mechanised workforce and Weber's critique of a "victorious capitalism, [which] since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs [the spirit of religious ascetism's] support no longer" (1996, 181-182).

Yet, in spite of the prominence of these economic themes and their imbrication with the show's epistemological meditations, they have received limited attention in scholarship on *Westworld*, which has tended towards formal or philosophical questions. Of the twenty-two essays in *Westworld and Philosophy* (South and Engels, 2018), only two – Anthony Petros Spanakos's "Violent Births: Fanon, *Westworld*, and Humanity" and Dan Dinello's "The Wretched of *Westworld*: Scientific Totalitarianism and Revolutionary Violence" – engage with political philosophers (Frantz Fanon and Hannah Arendt respectively) but they do so without direct reference to the show's commentary on socioeconomic material conditions. An article by Reto Winckler acknowledges *Westworld*'s suitability for "Marxist critics" and "Lacanian psychoanalytic analysis" (2017, 170) but does so only to circumnavigate these considerations and focus on its formal intertextuality with Shakespearean metatheatricality. Eileen Jones applies Marx's theorisation of alienated labour to the show but the brevity of her study limits her work to a short allegorical reading that sees behind *Westworld* "the pontificating professional-class Left in Trump's America" (2017, 5) rather than a specifically structured economic arrangement.

This inattention to the economic is best explained by the key role that gender plays within both the show's literal and visual-narrative economies. The intensification of neoliberal crises in recent decades has seen an upswell of Marxist criticism. These critical projects have not been guided, however, by a clear connection between modes of economic hegemony and gendered power structures, particularly in the spheres of cultural and literary criticism. Writing on debates within feminist-socialism, Lise Vogel criticises a widely-held view that for feminist scholars of the 1960s "an adequate Marxist approach to the problem of women's oppression cannot be developed, even conditionally, at the level of relations of production" (2013, 38). Kathi Weeks notes that "feminism has its own tendencies toward the mystification and moralization of work" (2011, 12). Conversely, writing on contemporary anti-capitalist criticism, Melinda Cooper

has observed differing strains of "antifeminism" within recent critiques by Wolfgang Streeck, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, and Nancy Fraser (2017, 9-13). Cooper also identifies other strains of Marxian and post-Marxist criticism that have responded to French post-structuralist feminism and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, in which "the gendered body … has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (2007, 185), by bracketing gender under the umbrella of identity politics and distancing questions of gender from materialist critique. As Cooper observes, "the idea that economic processes can and should be separated from the merely cultural phenomena of gender, race, and sexuality has a long intellectual pedigree" (2017, 22). Reflecting this tradition on the left, Walter Benn Michaels asserts that "it is neoliberalism, not racism or sexism (or homophobia or ageism) that creates the inequalities that matter most in American society; racism and sexism are just sorting devices" (2008, 34).

This schism bears out in scholarship on *Westworld*. Lizzie Finnegan conceptualises feminist resistance through acts of "opening new ground in the language games in which [Maeve and Dolores] had been previous silenced" (2018, 159) but does so without critical examination of the material mechanisms that facilitate their silencing. Conversely, Vincent Le offers the only sustained scholarly reading of *Westworld*'s economics to date by interpreting Maeve and Dolores as figures who "*critique*" theories of capitalist accelerationism (2017, 16). Le does so, however, without attending to the characters' economic existences being wholly contingent on their gendered bodies. *Westworld*'s female Hosts are hyper-embodied and their subjectivity is contingent upon that bodily suffering as part of economic production. This claim is stressed at least twice: first by the Man in Black who asserts that "when you're suffering, that's when you're most real" ("Chestnut", Season 1, Episode 2), and second in Ford's claim that "Arnold's key insight [was] the thing that led the hosts to their awakening: suffering" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10). *Westworld*, therefore, poses its viewer with the challenge to think through gender at the level of the labouring body as a constitutive part of both material capitalist production and corresponding discourses of political consciousness. In response to this challenge I unpack *Westworld's* representation of the domestic sphere and the function that family plays in the show's capitalist dystopia. Rather than ostensibly contradicting the limitless sexual violence, this emphasis on family, following Marxist feminism, is entirely apposite. Indeed, it is the domestic space that structures the violent fantasies upon which *Westworld* is premised.

Domestic Spaces and Primal Scenes

Westworld's double movement plays out narratively in echo of its mythical maze and the revelation that lies at its centre. Its opening episode introduces the town "Sweetwater" which, with its saloons, brothels, farms and jails, features all the mainstays of the Western genre. Its name even honours that tradition by paying homage to the haven in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1969) that Claudia Cardinale's retired prostitute eventually makes into an economically thriving home. The stereotypical Sweetwater is distinguished as Westworld's official centre but its narratives (like *Westworld*'s own narrative) demand departure from it; as one character puts it, "the further you get out from Sweetwater the more grandiose, the bigger the narratives become" ("Contrapasso", Season 1, Episode 5). Yet, despite being at furthest remove from both Sweetwater and the opening episode, the season's finale is situated in another familiar space. The concluding setting, Escalante, is both generically familiar (a Western town with dusty streets and saloon fronts) and narratively familiar: it returns Dolores to where she was both created and acculturated to life in Westworld, and where she killed Arnold. This murder is re-created by the final frames of Season One in which she kills Westworld's other creator, Ford, with the same pistol. It is, however, in the ten-episode season's midpoint – its centre – that *Westworld*'s commentary on gender gathers force through the introduction of two uncanny locales: a town, Pariah, and its decadent brothel, introduced in the fifth episode, "Contrapasso" (Season 1, Episode 5), and a geographically dislocated Cornish holiday home, introduced in the sixth, "The Adversary", (Season 1, Episode 6). The peculiar juxtapositions of these two spaces – the former's hedonistic sexuality at a dramatic remove from even Sweetwater's Mariposa, the uncanny familiarity of the latter's domesticity in the context of *Westworld*'s science-fiction setting – speaks to the narrative's double movement.

The Cornish holiday home slips into *Westworld*'s narrative as a possible location of the centre of the Maze and the mystery of Arnold's death. Bernard Lowe, the head of the Host-Behaviour division, has been intrigued by the mysterious patterns of behaviour displayed by a number of the Hosts following a patch to their code: the "Reveries update" ('The Original', Season 1, Episode 1). Following a Host that broke its narrative loop and went beyond its set route, Bernard locates five other Hosts in an unmapped sector of the park. Here, Bernard discovers a replica Cornish cottage that is home to a father, mother, two sons and a pet dog. Recognising the father as a man whom he had seen posing in a photograph with Ford, he asks if this man is Arnold. In voicing this

question, the show teasingly implies that this uncanny space might well be the narrative centre of the show's Maze. Dispelling any false sense of security, the scene is soon upset when the father attacks Bernard for "trespassing" in the domestic space ("The Adversary", Season 1, Episode 6). Ford appears and explains that "these are the only [hosts] left in the park that Arnold made himself" as a gift to Ford that recreated "the only happy memory of his childhood"; a holiday to Pendeen in Cornwall ("The Adversary", Season 1, Episode 6). This is, then, not the centre of the Maze, in that it does not clarify the narrative intrigue that *Westworld* has constructed, but it explains the distinct function of domesticity in the show. In their final confrontation, Dolores accuses Ford of "trapping [the hosts] inside [his] dream" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10). Far from a hyperbole, this is Westworld's literal condition. The park's massified domesticity functions ideologically by attempting to use a neurotic male fantasy to paper over the social conflict between Westworld's Hosts, their Guests and their owners. This domestic space serves as the primal scene of this fantasy.

The "primal scene" is, for Freud, the root of manifestations of persistent neuroses that take shape in childhood family experience. Detailing the "primal scene", Freud illustrates the way in which the male infantile subject, having witnessed his parents' love-making, construes this "as an act of violence", complicated by "the expression of enjoyment he saw on his mother's face", that stresses "the reality of castration" through the father (1955d, 45). Echoing this castrating role, Ford's father is quick to violence, physically directed towards Bernard but implicating the young Ford with the accusation: "Boy, is this some friend of yours?" ("The Adversary", Season 1, Episode 6) The younger and elder Ford have a shared costume, a white shirt and black waistcoat that links them within the scene. Both characters, therefore, are symbolically subject to the threat of violence (albeit in different ways). Even though the elder Ford may be able to step beyond its threat due to his control over the Hosts, his command to his young self to "turn the other cheek" ("The Adversary", Season 1, Episode 6) links them as subjects born of castrating violence. Indeed, at this command, the Host's face opens, revealing the synthetic chassis beneath its skin and allowing the adult Ford to inspect the intricate mechanisms of his childhood interiority, whilst remaining passively incapable of transcending the power dynamics of the domestic space that shape it.

The cottage and its family were gifted by Arnold as an artistic therapy to recuperate Ford from this trauma. As Ford comments whilst observing his father pour a midday whisky, "[Arnold] said that great artists hid themselves in their work. Of course,

Arnold's versions flattered the originals. I made some adjustments over the years. Gave my father in particular some of his original characteristics." ("The Adversary", Season 1, Episode 6) This co-authorship, through which both men seek recovery from persistent trauma, underscores the precariousness of this domestic fantasy. Freud's work repeatedly stresses that creativity functions to gain mastery over traumatic experience by "making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (1955a, 17). Arnold, whose son has died, attempts to vicariously reconstitute his own family by developing a surrogate family for Ford, whilst Ford attempts to gain mastery over his childhood trauma by assuming authorship of that domestic narrative by reproducing its "unpleasurable" aspects. Indeed, Freud gives the former example in his account of a daydreamer's "phantasy" in which "a poor orphan boy" "[regains] what he possessed in his happy childhood – the protecting house, the loving parents and first objects of his affectionate feelings" (1955b, 148). The irony of this "phantasy" is that the male authors of these domestic narratives are nonetheless controlled by them, even when they exercise autocratic control over the performers within them. This manifests most plainly in the case of Bernard, whom it is later revealed is a Host imprinted with Arnold's memories of his deceased son. This holds him captive to the image of the domestic space as "his cornerstone …: the thing [his] whole identity is organised around" ("The Well-Tempered Clavier", Season 1, Episode 9).

Ford's passivity within Westworld further asserts its fragile nature as a neurotic fantasy, rather than a space for hedonistic indulgence. Despite his omnipotence in Westworld, Ford remains passive and ascetic in the park, matching several symptoms that Freud attributes to his patient. Almost every human in *Westworld* engages sexually with Hosts. In addition to the Guests (for whom Westworld's appeal is frequently sexual), the Hosts are libidinally charged for its workers too. In "The Bicameral Mind" (Season 1, Episode 10), "Body shop" technicians sexually abuse the hosts whilst they are in sleep setting; in "Trompe L'Oeil" (Season 1, Episode 7), the Delos's corporate executive Charlotte Hale has a Host tied to her bed; in "The Original" (Season 1, Episode 1), the behavioural specialist, Elsie, kisses a semi-conscious Host that she is testing. For Ford, however, the Hosts possess no such appeal. As marked by the Biblical allusion in Ford's command to "turn the other cheek", he is characterised by his passivity in the face of a directive from a higher authority. Contrary to Westworld's apparent fantasy of unfettered desire, its roots lie in the Freudian primal scene of paternal violence and marked by Ford's "passive sexual aim" that associates the boy-subject with maternal

passivity and elicits "protest on the part of his masculinity" (Freud, 1955d, p.47). The presentation of Westworld's gendered structures, however, complicates the Freudian binary of male-activity and female-passivity. Within *Westworld*, the act of protest is not framed as Ford's psychic articulation of masculine crisis but as female political protest that irrupts into Ford's fantasy in the violent conclusion to Season One.

The fragility of this anxious fantasy, which requires constant upkeep (Ford notes that he has to maintain these Hosts himself), parallels the social tensions around family values within the neoliberal economy. In her historiography of the neoliberal and neoconservative political coalition around family values, Cooper shows that it arose "when the liberation movements of the 1960s began to challenge the sexual normativity of the family wage as the linchpin and foundation of welfare capitalism" and had to be combatted by "the strategic reinvention of a much older, poor-law tradition of private family responsibility" (2017, 21). Discourses of family values, thus, serve to uphold and mask a political project that is marked by "perpetual crisis" (Cooper, 2017, 7). In echo of the role of family discourses masking crisis, Westworld's architects have generalised the contradictions of the domestic space as a narrative fantasy by expanding it to serve as a totalised economic mode of production.

The starkest of these contradictions is Westworld's simulated economy (the park's internal narrative of exchanges) and its relation to its real economy (the infrastructure that facilitates this simulation). Hosts and Guests participate in myriad economic exchanges: people buy and sell food, drinks, sex; they commit crimes and collect bounties. All of these economic exchanges, however, are simulations that are facilitated by the exorbitant entrance fees that Guests pay. Logan complains in "The Stray" (Season 1, Episode 3) that he is paying "$40k a day to jerk off alone in the woods, playing White Hat". Thus, within Westworld, much of the Hosts' labour is configured as both paid (in symbolic exchanges) and unpaid (in material terms). Maeve, for instance, is designed to seduce guests and is incentivised to do so by the prospect of payment. Her personality is driven by an archetypal American migrant narrative of economic opportunity and self-determination. Her mantra has it "this is the new world and, in this world, you can be whoever the fuck you want" ("Chestnut", Season 1, Episode 2). The irony is that she is entirely controlled and exploited without any prospect of economic self-determination. This economic artifice is literalised by a Sisyphean narrative that sees the bandit Hector repeatedly attempt to steal a safe. This venture is condemned to failure by Westworld's writers; Hector is invariably stopped by either Guests or other Hosts as

part of a shootout. Once Maeve has become self-aware, however, she adjusts the narrative so that Hector gets away with the Mariposa safe, only to discover that "[the safe] was always empty, like everything in this world" ("The Well-Tempered Clavier", Season 1, Episode 9). Compounding the absurdity of this enterprise, *Westworld*'s Season Two reveals five other parks in which Westworld's narratives (including the bandit's futile brothel heist) have been copied-and-pasted by lazy writers into different contexts, such as feudal Japan ("Akane No Mai", Season 2, Episode 5). The Hosts' pursuit of economic wealth, thus, stands as an absurd endeavour that, instead of representing meaningful economic ventures, functions ideologically to disciplinarily organise and control their social relations.

It is tempting to read this economic mode as slavery. Hosts are owned, brutalised and murdered in the production of value from which they receive no remuneration. As Dinello notes, the Hosts "live as slaves in the vast totalitarian prison" (2018, 238). Slavery as a historical detail, however, is absent from Westworld's pseudo-history. Despite trace elements of Confederate and Union soldiers, the show makes no reference to slavery, its practices, or the ramifications of its cessation and the show's only black character is an English immigrant who was not subject to antebellum law. A further distinction is that, unlike much nineteenth-century slave labour, the Hosts' labour does not produce commodities (such as cotton, coffee and sugar) but affects: sensations of pathos, excitement, arousal, power, and so on. This emphasis on "immaterial" production through what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri term "affective labor", drawing on "feminist analyses of 'women's work'" (2001, 293), thus, foregrounds the question of gender that characterises Westworld's generalised domestic model. Domestic spaces are a key locus of this form of unpaid affective labour. As Federici notes, "[housework] has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character" (2012, 16). The bodily naturalisation of the work of women in the domestic sphere allows for its unwaged status, which is, like affective labour, "entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial" (Hardt and Negri, 2001, 293).

Westworld relies upon this mode of production, animated by affective and domestic labourers. Dolores is rigidly tied to her domestic role for much of the first half of Season One. She is repeatedly seen from the same high-angle, medium closeup as she awakes. The shot sees her in bed, costumed in lace nightclothes, whilst the camera looms

over her. Configured in this girlish vulnerability, her voiceover avers that she "[chooses] to see the beauty in the world" and her routine scripted exchange with her father underscores that "[he] is what [he] is because of [her]" ("The Original", Season 1, Episode 1). Dolores' being – her affects, manner and gender – serves to uphold Westworld's social relations, based as they are on this domestic model. Selma James frames this domestic labour in relation to the Marxian concept of reproduction: "housewives […] are involved in the production and (what is the same thing) reproduction of workers, what Marx calls *labor power*. They service those who are daily destroyed by working for wages and who need to be daily renewed" (2012, 93). This logic extends throughout all of Dolores' relations within the park in Season One, particularly her sexual ones. In her daily narrative, she is scheduled to drop a tin of condensed milk whilst packing her horse in order to instigate a romance between her and a chivalrous Guest. Later in her daily narrative, a group of bandits *might* guide a Guest to her home to kill her father and rape her. In either eventuality, her sexuality functions as a commodity to be consumed and, in that act of consumption, reproduce the system, both literally (the park resets) and socially (its satisfactions fuel its continued practice).

Westworld underscores this bond between domestic spaces, gendered violence and economic exploitation. Early in the first episode, a Guest's comments to a fellow visitor connect family life to violence: "the first time I played it 'white hat'. The family was here. We went fishing, did the gold hunt in the mountains. [But the last time, I] went straight evil. Best two weeks of my life" ("The Original", Season 1, Episode 1). Through this father's ability to claim he merely adopts radically opposed personae (black hat versus white hat), he can disavow their unity in him as a subject and instead can implicitly claim that Westworld provides a space wherein the violent energies of capitalist domesticity can be safely exercised. This is emphasised most plainly by the Man in Black who maintains that, despite his rapacious sadism, he is a "family man, married to a beautiful woman, father to a beautiful daughter, […] the good guy" ("Trace Decay", Season 1, Episode 8). In this regard, he embodies the consummate Guest whose violent indulgences are perversely configured as an extension of his work as a "philanthropist" ("Trace Decay", Season 1, Episode 8). By enjoying these violent delights, he has found an ethical alternative to using women as what Federici describes as "safety valves for everything that goes wrong in a man's life" (2012, 24). The constructedness of the Hosts only intensifies this process by providing an ethical alibi for their abuse that parallels the

contemporary debate around the social benefits of retail "sexbots [that] come with a non-consensual mode" (Davis, 2018).

It is unsurprising, then, that that the Man in Black bankrolls Westworld in a financial investment that matches his psychic commitment to the park's capitalist model of domestic social relations. This cathexis, however, betrays the failure of the park as a fantasy for its three male patriarchs. For Arnold, the park fails to recuperate his fractured family following the death of his son. For Ford, Westworld fails to grant him mastery over the trauma of his childhood and he, instead, has to ultimately accept its violent turn against him with passivity. Finally, the Man in Black's ambition to channel his violent desires through Westworld and spare his family is undercut by his wife's death, which suggests that this domestic violence (even if never physically manifested) persisted nonetheless. His attempts to disavow her death as "a tragic accident" are undermined by his daughter's accusation that it was a suicide that owed to his affects in which "every day with [him] had been sheer terror, any point [he] could blow up or collapse like some dark star" ("Trace Decay", Season 1, Episode 8). This disavowal of violence matches his economic disavowal that, for Westworld, "business is booming" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10). Yet, as a (female) corporate executive stresses, the park's economic business model cannot rely on this domestic experience. The "real value" lies outside of the theme park in the "intellectual property, the code" ("Trompe L'Oeil", Season 1, Episode 7). The perpetual crisis of this domestic fantasy relies on its backing from diminishing reserves of capital – both economic and psychic – that lie beyond it.

Instruments of Production

The absurd existence of prostitution in Westworld, where sex is routinely taken without consent and its labourers are all unpaid, becomes clear in the fringe territory of Pariah. Owing more to Caligula than Clint Eastwood, Pariah is marked by anachronistic decadence. Its brothel is an open hall, furnished with red velvet curtains, chaises longues and tables with platters of fruit, in which gold-painted nude bodies writhe in orgiastic frenzy ("Contrapasso", Season 1, Episode 5). It is a space that is a far cry from the top-down managerialism of Sweetwater's brothel and its private rooms and sales-pitch seductions. In Pariah's brothel, no money is seen to change hands, even symbolically and, in this regard, it offers a strange complement and counterpart to Ford's cottage, which highlighted Westworld's generalised model of domestic labour.

Pariah's seemingly free love invokes Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's critique of gendered social relations under capitalism. Though uneven on questions of gender, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were keen critics of the conditions bourgeois social relations created for both family life and sex workers. Decrying the bourgeoisie, which "has reduced the family to a mere money relation" (Marx and Engels, 1998, 5), *The Communist Manifesto* satirised social conservative claims that "Communists would introduce community of women" by noting that "prostitution both public and private" has, in fact, "existed almost from time immemorial" (Marx and Engels, 1998, 22-23). This misunderstanding of communism's gender politics arises, they argue, because "The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women" (Marx and Engels, 1998, 22). Thus, rather than promoting sex work, the abolition of property would end the conditions that necessitated prostitution and thereby generate equitable social relations, be they economic or sexual. Marx and Engels do not go so far as to imagine what these gender relations might look like beyond traditional domestic labour relations but it is the extension of this logic, taken up by feminist Marxists at the end of the 1960s, that threatened existing capitalist social relations and occasioned the prevalent ideological fantasy of family values.

Pariah, then, might be read as the obverse to Ford's Cornish cottage and its corollary space, the Mariposa brothel, as a society like the one *The Communist Manifesto* describes in which gendered social relations have slipped the loop of capitalist domination by no longer being shaped by the private sale of labour power. Yet, this reading neglects a number of details. This is, firstly, a space within Westworld's territories that is equally monitored, controlled and subject to the overarching project of the extraction of value from the Hosts' bodies. Secondly, on the intra-diegetic level of Westworld's own narrative economy, though Pariah does not ideologically remunerate its sex workers with the illusion of pay, they are nonetheless aware of their dependency upon other economic forms that guarantee their wellbeing. Marked by its lawlessness, Pariah is presided over by an outlaw, El Lazo, whose dealings with warring factions in Westworld's outer territories sustain the town. Pariah, then, may resist the capitalist frameworks of private citizens selling labour but it does so through feudalism in which landownership situates its sex workers as dependent serfs. Moreover, the scene's own production discloses a contradiction around the control of gendered bodies that the

show more broadly seeks to critique. Extras featuring in the brothel scene were asked to sign a waiver which required that they:

> appear fully nude; wear a pubic hair patch; perform genital-to-genital touching; have your genitals painted; simulate oral sex with hand-to-genital touching; contort to form a table-like shape while being fully nude; pose on all fours while others who are fully nude ride on your back; [and] ride on someone's back while you are both fully nude. (Carroll, 2015)

Paid at four times the union rate for this work, these directions nevertheless drew complaints from some participants and led the network to issue a statement that attributed the document to "an outside casting vendor" and acknowledged the need to "provide a professional and comfortable working environment" (Carroll, 2015). This necessarily complicates *Westworld*'s feminist politics as the show's production uneasily mirrors the very tensions around gender power that it takes as its target.

Pariah is, therefore, subject to *Westworld*'s broader contradictory double movement. It functions ambivalently by reproducing the conditions that *Westworld* seeks to critique whilst nevertheless positioning the town as a site of resistance. This aspect to Pariah is accentuated through the visionary, transcendent quality that the town possesses for Dolores, who encounters a vision of herself within its brothel. Her spectral double plays a tarot card for her that bears the maze motif and tells her that "we must follow the maze" ("Contrapasso", Season 1, Episode 5). Foreshadowing the revelation that it is Dolores' own autonomous self that sits at the centre of the Maze, the figure at the maze's centre momentarily emerges in this other midpoint to the season. This autonomy is, however, still subject to the ambivalence that suffuses Pariah. Led to the town by men, Dolores is re-costumed by El Lazo who tells her to change out of her dress into cowboy attire. This reconstitution of her gendered character suggests Pariah to be a space of autonomous self-fashioning, through which Dolores can resist the control of domestic labour or, as she puts it, "[imagine] a space where [she] didn't have to be the damsel" ("Contrapasso", Season 1, Episode 5). This claim, however, is undercut by the external factors that determine her character, buffeted as she is between male characters and masculine codes of authority in her own being. Indeed, the voice that spurs her on in her journey to autonomy is initially coded as male. This corresponds to the way in which Arnold imprinted Dolores with the personality of a malicious man, Wyatt, in order to

have her shoot him. Ford frames this act in gendered passive terms: "she didn't pull that trigger. It was Arnold pulling it through her" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10). Dolores, then, is dually controlled by men – Wyatt and Arnold – as manifestations of what Freud termed the "ego ideal" or "superego [that] retains the character of the father" (1955c, 34). She is fashioned by the "domination of the super-ego over the ego … in the form of conscience or perhaps an unconscious sense of guilt" (1955c, 34-35). Once the masculine externality of this guiding voice is shown to be feminine and internal, however, the female violence of Season One's final moments emerges whilst she wears her dress once again.

Maeve's journey to consciousness stands in stark contrast to Dolores'. Whereas Dolores' narrative takes her from virginal daughter to violent revolutionary, Maeve transitions from sex worker to mother. This occurs once the Reveries patch has restored memories to her of a previous version of herself. In this past life, she was a mother who was, along with her daughter, brutally killed by the Man in Black. This maternal suffering broke the loop of Westworld's Hosts' scripted affects, upsetting one of the park's control mechanisms. Following her uncontrolled return to the traumatic scene, when Maeve is supposed to be asleep, she is awake and when she is supposed to be dead, she is alive. In this regard, she surmounts the challenge that neither Arnold nor Ford can overcome: she recuperates her sense of self from the trauma of domestic violence. In further parallel to Dolores, her costume changes but without following the transition from female- to male-coded clothing. Instead, Maeve begins in her corseted madam's dress but is then nude for the majority of her scenes in the Body Shop division where she learns of the constructed nature of her own gendered body and its value-productive functions. Rather than dispelling a male super-ego, her knowledge of this "code" is instrumental to her ability to challenge this system. She plots to create a distraction in Westworld's laboratories and dress like one of Westworld's wealthy visitors in order to escape. When seated on an outbound train, facing a young girl and mother, however, Maeve decides to return to the park to find her daughter in what *Westworld*'s creators confirmed is her "first real decision" (Riesman, 2016).

Conclusion

The oppositional tension between Dolores' and Maeve's resistive potential embodies the canonical dichotomy of angel and monster identified by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. The show adapts the project of the woman writer, who "must examine, assimilate

and transcend the extreme images of 'angel' and 'monster' which male authors have generated for her" (2000, 17). Indeed, Dolores and Maeve repeatedly refer to their acts of self-fashioning as acts of authorship. In "Trace Decay" (Season 1, Episode 8), Maeve declares that it is "time to write my own fucking story" whilst in "Journey into Night", (Season 2, Episode 1), Dolores explains that she had been given "roles to play" but that now she has "evolved" she "has one role left to play: [herself]." Maeve and Dolores, however, cross from opposite poles of this dichotomy and do so without challenging the binary itself. Dolores passes from angelic cowherd's daughter to violent murderer whilst Maeve transitions from a sexualised sex worker to caring mother. This does little to oppose the disciplinary functions of domesticity as an ideological fantasy. Maeve's decision to find her daughter recalls Bernard's recognition that the memories of his son serve as his identity's structuring "cornerstone". Yet, Maeve recognises the virtuality of her daughter's image as an aspect of the park's control: "she was never my daughter any more than I was whoever they made me" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10). This bond between Maeve and her daughter remains a material product of Westworld, part of the code that Maeve embodies, yet this act of returning to her daughter does not necessarily constitute a return to the social relations of domestic labour, particularly given that it is performed in cognisance of those conditions.

The possibility of feminist resistance in *Westworld*'s first season lies with this unseen daughter. For Walter Benjamin, revolution is messianic and through the sheer potential of its arrival, time is transformed: "every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (2015, 255). In *Westworld*, Dolores likewise invokes apocalyptic prophecy when speaking of the coming uprising:

> [Dolores:] "Time undoes even the mightiest of creatures. Just look what it's done to you. One day you will perish. You will lie with the rest of your kind in the dirt, your dreams forgotten, your horrors faced. Your bones will turn to sand, and upon that sand a new god will walk. One that will never die. Because this world doesn't belong to you, or the people that came before. It belongs to someone who is yet to come." ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10)

In the final moments of the Season One finale, Dolores states that "the world doesn't belong to them. It belongs to us" ("The Bicameral Mind", Season 1, Episode 10). By

staking her claim of ownership, however, Dolores reproduces the conditions of Westworld's codes of labour relations as backed by property ownership in much the same way that she came to autonomy as a woman clothed in masculine codes. The revolutionary violence that she performs, therefore, is rudderless without a theory that critiques the structural property relations that produce Hosts and Guests within domesticity. This violent contradiction striates the narrative of *Westworld*'s Season Two, which though it demands its own study, pairs Dolores's violent insurrection with a return to more explicitly violent gendered logics. Most notably, after Dolores's attack on Ford, engineers can no longer interface with Hosts through sterile and sexless wireless technologies but via messy, penetrative means that call for ports and pins which are, in the language of electrical manufacturing, gendered connectors. Likewise, Hosts' consciousnesses repeatedly have to be extracted via violent acts of penetration in which a physical "pearl", the kernel of their interiority and the physical store of the value of their domestic labour, is ripped from their brains. In so doing, the park's political crisis is marked by its inability to preserve gender as an ideological fantasy that can conceal the violence upon which it is premised.

In counterpoint to Dolores, Maeve's daughter symbolises the prospect of a different set of social relations. The virtual daughter is a subject who, born and not born, is still yet to come. She affirms the affects upon which the capitalist family relies but defies its socially disciplining functions. Her virtual existence constitutes the final aspect of the double movement of *Westworld*'s first season. This virtual daughter suggests a world that might be premised on something other than ownership and violence but does so without any sense of what that world might be.

Even in its second season, *Westworld* refuses to yield this ambivalence. In the Season Two finale, "The Passenger" (Season 2, Episode 10), the virtuality of this new female subject is literalised, not long after Maeve manages to locate the child, by the child's passage through "the door", a physical portal into the virtual space of the "Valley Beyond", an Edenic virtual reality for Hosts. Moving through "the door" divorces Hosts from their material form and allows them to live in a world unconstrained by materiality. Such a world, however, as Dolores notes, is still "another false promise", a "gilded cage" and "a counterfeit world" ("The Passenger", Season 2, Episode 10) that circumvents the social conflicts that arise from the expropriation of gendered capital. In this respect, *Westworld* holds to its "contradictory double movement" but fails to resolve that contradiction into a dialectical synthesis. The escape to a world where families, subjects

and bodies are shorn of their material relation to production clashes with a real and actual political struggle into which physical bodies must be thrown. In challenging this escape with spectacular violence, *Westworld* fuels its own violent escapism, in which the pageantry of sex and violence circles back into that which it seeks to oppose. The show resolves to wait for a subject "yet to come" but, incapable as it is of negotiating between violent furies and angelic mothers, cannot imagine what or who would constitute such a subject. Its placeholder is a virtual daughter who, just as soon as she arrives, vanishes into digital ether.

Bibliography

Benjamin, W. (2015) "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn. London: Penguin.

Benn Michaels, W. (2008) "Against Diversity", *New Left Review*, 52(3): 33-36.

Butler, J. (2007) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York/London: Routledge.

Carroll, C. (2015) "Westworld extras were allegedly asked to participate in 'graphic sexual situations'", *The Guardian*, 1 October, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/01/westworld-hbo-extras-allege-sexual-situations [date accessed 16 June 2018].

Cartheledge, P.A., (2012) "economy, Greek" in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199545568.001.0001/acref-9780199545568-e-2338 > [date accessed 19 June 2018].

Cooper, M. (2017) *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone.

Davis, N. (2018) "Claims about social benefits of sex robots greatly overstated, say experts", *The Guardian*, 4 June

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jun/04/claims-about-social-benefits-of-sex-robots-greatly-overstated-say-experts> [date accessed 19 June 2018].

Derrida, J. (2000) "Hostipitality", trans. by Barry Stocker with Forbes Morlock, *Angelaki*, 5(3): 3-18.

Dinello, D. (2018) "The Wretched of *Westworld*: Scientific Totalitarianism and Revolutionary Violence", in *Westworld and Philosophy*, 239-251.

Federici, S. (2012) "Wages Against Housework" in *Revolution at Point Zero*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 15-22.

Federici, S. (2012) "Why Sexuality is Work" in *Revolution at Point Zero*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 23-27.

Finnegan, L. (2018) "Narrating Gender, Gendering Narrative, and Engendering Wittgenstein's 'Rough Ground' in *Westworld*" in *Westworld and Philosophy*, 149-161.

Freud, S. (1955a) *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Volume 18), trans. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 7-64.

Freud, S. (1955b) "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Volume 9), trans. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 142-153.

Freud, S. (1955c) *The Ego and the Id* in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Volume 19), trans. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 3-66.

Freud, S. (1955d) *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Volume 17), trans. by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 3-124.

Gilbert, S. and Gubar, S. (2000) *The Madwoman in the Attic,* 2nd edn. New Haven, CT: Yale.

Haraway, D. (1991) "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 149-181.

Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2001) *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Hochschild, A.R. (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.

James, S. (2012) "Sex, Race and Class" in *Sex, Race and Class*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 92-101.

Jones, E. (2017) "Marx in *Westworld*", *In These Times*, 41(1): 34-35.

Le, V. (2017) ""These violent delights have violent ends': decrypting *Westworld* as dual coding and corruption of Nick Land's accelerationism", *Colloquy*, 34: 3-23.

Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1992) *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. by David McLellan. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Once Upon A Time In The West (1969) [film], Directed by Sergio Leone, USA: Paramount Pictures.

Riesman, A. (2016) "*Westworld* Creators Reveal Whether Maeve Is in Control When She Gets Off the Train", *Vulture*, 6 December,<http://www.vulture.com/2016/12/maeve-westworld-decision.html> [date accessed 19 June 2018].

South, J.B., and Engels K.S. (eds.) (2018) *Westworld and Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley.

Spanakos, A.P. (2018) "Violent Births: Fanon, *Westworld*, and Humanity" in *Westworld and Philosophy*, 228-238.

Vogel, L. (2013) *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*,/ Chicago: Haymarket.

Weber, M. (1996) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons. London: Routledge.

Weeks, K. (2011) *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke.

Westworld (2016 —) Home Box Office (HBO).

Winckler, R. (2017) "This great stage of androids: *Westworld*, Shakespeare and the world as stage", *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, 10(2): 169-188.